

Senator Ted Kennedy's Health Care Legacy

by Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi

Last night, our country lost one of the most important public servants in U.S. history, Senator Ted Kennedy. My thoughts and prayers go out to his wife Vickie, his children, First Lady Maria Shriver, the Governor and the entire Kennedy family. The nation and the world have lost a leader with unparalleled passion for social justice and equality, and his legacy will live on in the many lives and hearts he touched. They will carry the flame of justice and service forward.

Senator Kennedy fought for health care access for every American. In the 1990s, he was one of the lead architects of S-CHIP, which has provided millions of low-income children with the health care they deserve, and he tirelessly promoted universal coverage throughout his career. As Kennedy said during his riveting address at the Democratic National Convention in Denver last year:

"This is the cause of my life - new hope, that we will break the old gridlock and guarantee that every American - north, south, east, west, young, old - will have decent quality health care as a fundamental right and not as a privilege."

To honor Senator Kennedy, Senator Robert Byrd has proposed naming the health care reform package after Kennedy. As we mourn the loss of a great man, we must continue the work that is required to make sure his lifelong cause is accomplished. Senator Kennedy's passing gives renewed focus to the need to pass meaningful health care reform that includes the public option. If he were still with us today, he would agree that there is no more fitting a tribute to his legacy. As Dr. Howard Dean said today, "When President Obama signs a healthcare reform bill late this year, Ted Kennedy may not be standing there next to him, but his presence will be deeply apparent in the Oval Office as the President's pen moves across the page."